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**JULY MEETING:** As usual, there will be no meeting of the Association indoors this month. The August meeting will be devoted to a general exchange of experiences during the vacation season.

Members who have been fortunate enough to encounter birds under interesting circumstances, are urged to report such occurrences on this occasion and thus contribute to what is one of our most enjoyable functions of the year.

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**JULY FIELD TRIP** will be taken on Sunday, July 11th, to the University Campus, Berkeley. San Francisco members will take 8:40 a.m. Key Route boat, transferring to "Berkeley" train at mole, and ride to end of line at University and Shattuck Avenues, where party will form upon arrival of train at 9:20 a.m. East Bay members may reach this point by either College, Telegraph, Shattuck or Grove cars. Bring lunch.

Mrs. T. J. Allen, President of the Cooper Ornithological Club, has kindly consented to lead this trip.

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**PROCEEDINGS OF THE JUNE MEETING:** The regular meeting scheduled for June was postponed one week to enable the membership to accept the invitation of the Cooper Club to attend its meeting in the History Building at Mills College, on the 17th inst., under the auspices of the Pacific Division of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. No business was transacted at this meeting, but the entire time was devoted to the very interesting papers submitted. Fourteen members were present.

Mr. Ralph Hoffman, of Santa Barbara, described observations made by him, in the vicinity of Bakersfield, Alturas, Eagle Lake and Crescent City, of the courtship and post-mating performances of some fourteen species; of the western grebe and its glide; of the billing and under-water antics of the pigeon guillemot; of the fish dance and figure 8 manœuvres of the Forster and black terns; of the peculiar notes of the Beal petrels and Cassin anklets; of the expanded head feathers and chest and stiffly-spread tail of the ruddy duck and its tattoo with bill, on chest; of the reversal in form of the Wilson phalarope, with the females pursuing the males and achieving something like singing; of the Wilson snipe and its weird winnowing at sunset; of the sage grouse gathering, with as many as fifty-seven cocks in attendance, and strutting in turn; of the marsh hawk male diving, rising and turning over time and again; of the Texas night-hawk's antics in the sage; of the 3-toed woodpecker drumming with a loud rolling noise near the female in the nest, some four feet above ground, and a second male displaying his charms for good measure; and, finally, of the sage thrasher singing its usual song for a matter of 18-20 seconds, then looping around within a diameter of 200 feet or so, and swooping over each sage brush in its path, softly singing the while.

Dr. Tracy I. Storer then traced the steps by which the western robin has extended its breeding range in California during the last ten or twelve years, more especially in this vicinity; loitering, apparently, short of its usual breeding habitat in the boreal zone, as the works of man operated to foster or develop conditions favorable to its breeding, where formerly this was unknown.

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## THE SURF BIRD'S TRYSTING PLACE—A MYSTERY NO LONGER

In 1785, John Latham, in his "General Synopsis of Birds", iii. p. 180, described a specimen of this little bird, and referred it to the genus *Tringa*, of sandpipers, after which it passed out of sight for many years, until J. K. Townsend secured a single specimen at the mouth of the Columbia, in November, 1836 and sent it to Audubon, who redescribed the species as new, and founded thereon a new genus *Aphriza*, by which name it is still known, with the specific title of *virgata*. It has been noted since that time, with greater or less frequency, until its status is described by Dr. Joseph Grinnell as that of a "fairly common spring and fall migrant on rocky portions of the seashore." Notwithstanding its occurrence along the entire stretch of the coast from northwestern Alaska to the straits of Magellan, nothing has been definitely known of its life history or breeding habits, except its conduct when flirting with the surf and feeding along the rocks. In Newton's Dictionary of Birds, 1896, Dr. R. W. Shufeldt refers to statements made by the natives to Dr. Nelson, that the bird nested on the bare mountains of the interior of Alaska, which however were not given full credence. This statement received a vague degree of corroboration when Dr. Grinnell, during his exploration of the Kotzebue Sound region, in 1899, where the Arctic Circle cuts the northwestern coast of Alaska, secured three specimens some forty miles inland, and natives who recognized the birds stated that they nested in the tundra of the mountainous country further inland.

Twenty-seven years more have elapsed, so that, for one hundred forty-two years since John Latham first described him, *Aphriza virgata* has gamboled along the full length of the Pacific coast of the two Americas, with the secret of his nesting grounds locked within his wise little head. It has been reserved for Mr. Joseph Dixon, Economic Mammologist of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology of the University of California and Honorary Member of the Association, accompanied by Mr. George Wright, Member of the Association since its organization, to encounter the surf bird at home on its nest, above timber line on Mount McKinley, 150 miles from the coast. Mr. Wright tells the story briefly, thus:

"The long-sought-for eggs of the surf bird have been found. It seemed almost wrong to look at the nest, thus robbing the bird of a secret it has jealously guarded for so many years.

"The nest was placed in a little saddle on the barren mountain at about 4,000 feet altitude, which is high above timber-line. It was placed in the bare rocky tundra, with only a few lichens for lining.

"The four unbelievably large eggs were of a buffy ground color, with an abundance of chocolate brown markings and violet under-markings. They lay there with small ends placed very symmetrically together, just the loveliest things you have ever imagined.

"Mr. Surf Bird was the bravest little father you ever saw. He would let us put our hands within ten inches of him when he would suddenly spring into the air right at our faces. At other times he slid right onto the eggs while the tripod loomed over the nest. \* \* \*

Our members will all rejoice that this merited good fortune has come to two gentlemen whom we are happy and proud to have as associates and good friends.

A. S. KIBBE.

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## BIRD LIFE ON THE NORTHERN PRAIRIES

The winter of 1888 in the Territory of the Dakotas, and especially the blizzard of January 1st, 2nd, and 3d of that year, will long be remembered by those unfortunate enough to be there. There was six feet of snow on the level, which was packed so hard by the force of the wind that both man and beast could travel on its surface. Both human and other life had suffered and neither before nor since have I seen the wolves so bad. They were as active by day as by night and it seemed that no living thing that was not under shelter and fed, would survive until spring. All buildings were completely snowed under and entrance to house and barn was had through the roofs, leaving the interiors in darkness day and night.

On the morning of March 10th, I found, upon emerging into the light, that the long-prevailing northwest wind had ceased and the air seemed strange. Could it be spring? My question was quickly answered by a wind from the south, and the chinook commenced to fairly strip the snow from the ground. Within a week many bare spots were showing and on the sunny sides of the hills one could find the crocuses budding within a few feet of the snow.

The rapid change in the surface of the prairie was hardly less startling than the alterations in appearance of some of the birds and mammals. The great jack rabbit, snow-white except for the tips of his ears, became an uninteresting brown. The diablo of the animal kingdom changed its ermine coat for one with seal-brown back and sulphur-yellow belly, but retained the black tail and ear tips. The great snowy owl's pure white feathers suddenly became blotched with brown and soon all white would disappear. The crocuses turned the prairies into a pale lavender sea of beauty, as far as the eye could reach. The northerly migration of birds soon followed and it always held for me the deepest interest. The first comer was the meadow-lark, which is a much better singer than a weather prophet, for the snow and sleet yet to come will punish him for his temerity. Presently the bobolink arrives and you can say "good bye" to winter for this bird has no time to waste. He must rush up into the air, saying, "bobolink, bobolink," then hover long enough to cry "spink, spank, spink," dropping gently down into the buffalo grass and making ready for another rocket-like ascension.

Just at sunrise, you will hear a hollow booming and, as the sun's rays flood the hill-tops, the noise increases and comes from all sides. If you will quietly approach a knoll from down-wind, first taking the precaution of decorating your hat with grasses or weeds, you will have the opportunity of watching the morning stag dance of the prairie cock. From six to twenty of these birds select a knoll-top and congregate there each morning at sunrise. You will see them strolling aimlessly about. Suddenly one of the group will rush forward, lower his head, raise the feathers on his neck, inflate the orange air sac on each side of the neck and, with wide spread tail and drooping wings, expel the air with a "bu, bu, bully for you" noise which can be heard from a great distance. The bird then lowers his feathers and aimlessly strolls back to the brow of the hill while another member goes through the same performance. These meetings take place every morning throughout



## THE GULL

the nesting season, with the same number of birds present. There seems to be no discord in the assembly; the same knoll is used throughout the season and in a few weeks the short buffalo grass is worn off, leaving the ground bare.

CARL R. SMITH.

(To be concluded)

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**JUNE FIELD TRIP** was taken on Sunday, the 13th, to Fairfax and over the Bolinas grade to the concrete pipe line crossing; thence *via* old grade to Bon Tempe and head of Alpine Lake, where lunch was eaten. A hasty visit was made to Liberty, without locating any additional birds, and we retraced our steps up-creek to Lagunitas Lake. A portion of the party walked around the lake and the trip was continued down the fish grade to Ross, past Phoenix Lake.

The day was bright and fine, with a cool wind out of the west. The feature of the trip was furnished by two Vaux swifts floating through the air near Bon Tempe.

Birds encountered were: Pied-bill grebe and female mallard at Phoenix Lake; Loon, California murre, western and Heerman gulls, cormorant, great blue heron and clapper (?) rail on Richardson Bay; western sandpiper along Key mole; California quail, western mourning dove, turkey vulture, red-tailed hawk and kingfisher; willow and California woodpeckers, red-shafted flicker, Vaux swifts and Anna hummer; western flycatcher and young, California jay, crow, meadowlark and Brewer blackbird; purple finch, linnet, willow and green-backed goldfinches and western lark sparrow; chipping and song sparrows; San Francisco and brown towhees and Pacific black-headed grosbeak; lazuli bunting, cliff, barn and northern violet-green swallows and warbling vireo; lutescent, yellow and golden pileolated warblers, Vigors and house wrens; plain titmouse, chickadee, bush and wren tits; russet-backed thrush, western robin and young and western bluebird. Fifty-two species.

Members in attendance: Mesdemoiselles Cassiday, Cohen, Ethel Crum; Mesdames Kibbe and Myer; Messrs. Bremer, Bryant, Bunker, Kibbe and Myer. As guests: Mrs. Bunker, Mrs. Juda and Mr. Pursell, and Scouts B. Benjamin, L. Gruher, L. Herbers and Felix Juda. Ten members and seven guests.

A. S. KIBBE.

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## AUDUBON ASSOCIATION OF THE PACIFIC

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